We are the heirs of a heroic nation

By: Enrique Ubieta Gómez / from his Facebook profile
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We are not an NGO. We are a country. We are not a band of madmen. We are a nation full of madmen. When the airplane landed in Havana and the engines stopped, we knew the people was waiting for us. People is not an abstract word. The people are our family, our neighbors, our co-workers. They are humble and working individuals. We were nervous, happy, anxious. The boys and girls primped their white coats —symbol of solidarity— and barely tied their ties, as the grooms and brides before going to the definitive date. The door just opened. The other passengers, others Cuban individuals stranded in Italy, gave us a sound round of applause. One lady, incapable of understanding, dared to say: “ask for a pay raise.” In our look, she got the message.

Minutes later, we stepped on our motherland. We are not aliens, we are the result of this nation, its history and values. We are not **heroes** —we are proud of ourselves, we really are, but this word kind of freaked us

out— as heroism implies a degree of uniqueness; we are the heirs of a heroic nation. Therefore, even though it might seem odd to others, our President welcomed us all. And the wives, mothers and children of these doctors and nurses, in a previously arranged video, voiced a sort of puzzling phrase for the system focused on selling and buying: “we are proud of you.” On our route to the place we are going to be quarantined, I was thinking about that Italian photographer who wanted to travel with us to take some pictures, and perhaps figure it out by herself how it was possible —our secret— and feel the magic embracing out welcome into the 21st century, to a group of mere mortals who have not won any world championship, or had stepped on the moon. We had just risked our lives to save others´.

I saw the answer in the street. At times, I saw no people at all. I even saw one or two pedestrians who did not feel motivated to greet us. But in humble neighborhoods where the caravan passed by, people rushed to meet and greet us: behind their windows, or gathered in the entrance gates, children and senior citizens, they all waved their hands with passion. In populated areas, several people waited hours for us to see us passing by. We will never forget that. But how to react? I confess I did not know what to do. I did not know whether I used my camera and wrote down what I had just saw from my privileged position as a reporter or I let my emotions conquered my eyes with tears, my senses, every time someone greeted us by touching their chests as a sign of recognition, giving their hearts back to all of us.

I wonder if that Italian photographer could have taken some pictures without being moved to tears. What a people we have! How furious the empire must be as those rounds of applause cannot be bought! We want a decent, thriving life in accordance with our efforts and sacrifices. That is why we condemn the US blockade as it is harmful to our dignity. But selfish people are scared of those applauses as they prove another world is actually possible, feasible. The Cuban doctors and nurses are really at the vanguard of this world.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff